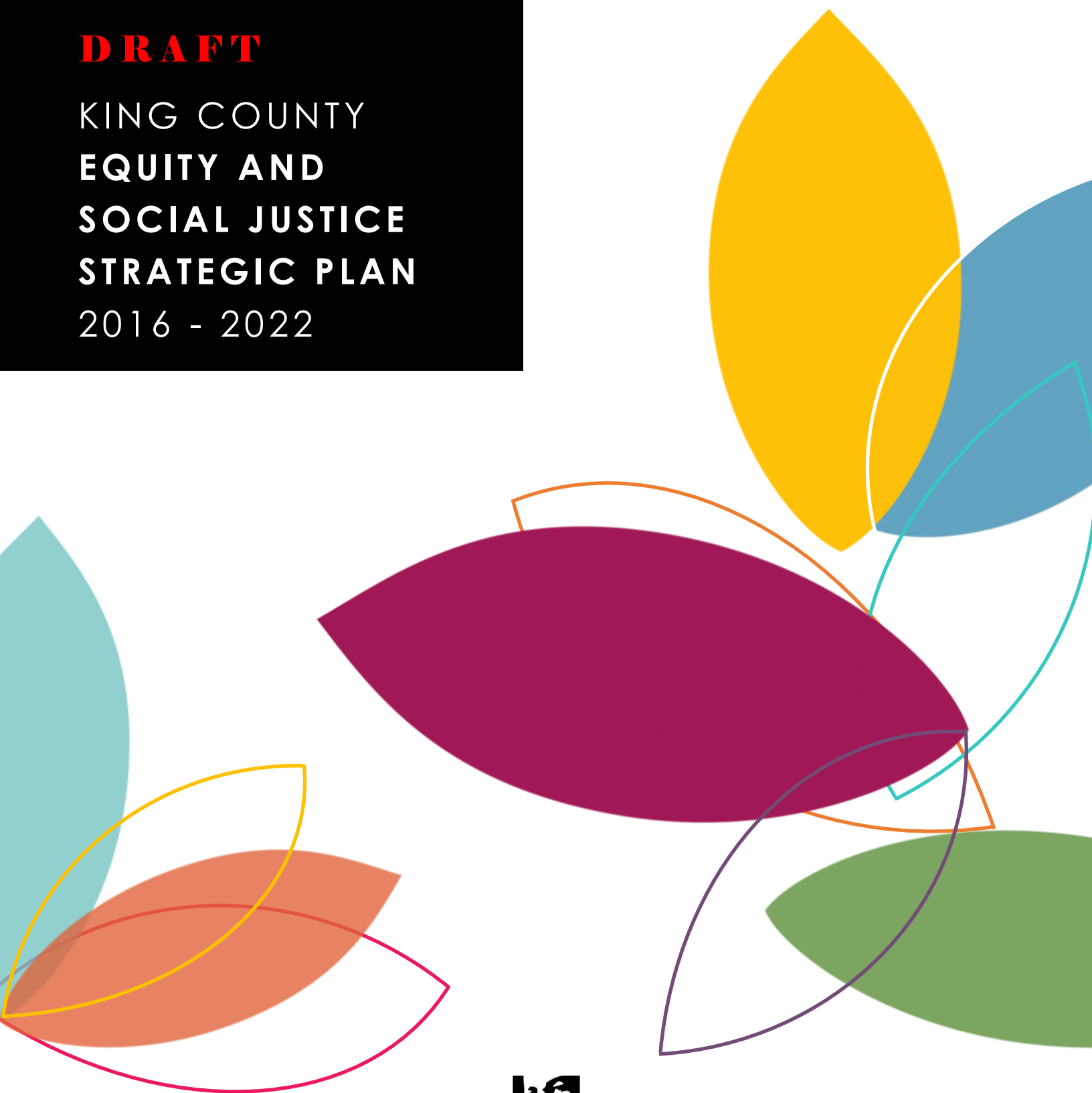


**DRAFT**

KING COUNTY  
EQUITY AND  
SOCIAL JUSTICE  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2016 - 2022



King County

# INTRODUCTION



For many in our region King County is a great place to live, learn, work and play. We have some of the most prosperous communities in the world. However, a closer look at the distribution of resources and wealth reveals that we have deeply entrenched social, economic and environmental inequities – by race and place – that in many cases are worsening and threaten our collective prosperity.

An array of historical and societal factors drives these inequities including unequal access to the [determinants of equity](#), institutional and structural racism, as well as gender and socioeconomic bias. These factors, while invisible to some of us, have profound and tangible impacts on all of us – both in the community and within our own organization.

## PHASES OF OUR WORK

King County's work on equity and social justice can be described as fitting into distinct phases. Before 2008, many of our departments and agencies focused on disparities and

disproportionality in various realms such as health and criminal justice, which were generally not coordinated across the County. In early 2008, then-King County Executive Ron Sims launched Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) as an "initiative." Based out of the Executive Branch, this initiative aimed to intentionally use an equity lens into departments' policies and decisions, organizational practices and engagement with community.

Starting in 2010 with new King County Executive Dow Constantine and the County Council, Equity and Social Justice became an integrated part of the County's work with the countywide Strategic Plan and ESJ ordinance. This new ordinance named the Inter-Branch Team as the coordinator and facilitator of the County's equity work and formalized systems and frameworks, including the Determinants of Equity.

This last year represents the latest phase for King County Equity and Social Justice with two major developments: the creation of the Office

# INTRODUCTION

of Equity and Social Justice and the launch of the first ESJ Strategic Plan process. Established on January 1, 2015, the new Office of Equity and Social Justice works hand-in-hand with the Inter-Branch Team to support the work of all County employees and agencies. The office also serves as the backbone and coordinator of key County efforts to advance equity in the organization and community. Although there is now an ESJ Office, every County agency and employee is still ultimately responsible for advancing and being accountable for ESJ activities and deliverables.

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Our strategies as One King County to advance Equity and Social Justice are **to invest:**

- **Upstream and where needs are greatest**
- **In community partnerships**
- **In employees**

And we do this with **accountable and transparent leadership.**

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Our next phase – guided by this Strategic Plan – is based on our understanding that how we approach our work on Equity and Social Justice is just as important as what we seek to accomplish. We will become pro-equity in County practices and governance by using an equity lens in our actions, processes and decisions. We will invest upstream and where needs are greatest, addressing root causes and smartly allocating our public resources. We will also invest in community partnerships as a strategy to better understand and address equity impacts throughout our region. We will

invest in our employees to create a strong, racially diverse workforce and workplace at all levels that is best positioned to advance equity in our region. Moreover, we recognize that the success of this plan and progress on equity is fundamentally tied to visible and accountable leadership in King County government.

## OUR VISION

The Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Strategic Plan is a blueprint for change, mutually created by King County employees and community partners. From the outset, the planning process heard from people across sectors, geography and populations including those who experience the most negative effects of inequities and are working to remove barriers to opportunity. More than 600 employees at all levels of County government and 100 local organizations, including community organizations, philanthropy, labor, business and local governments, shared their insight and expertise on where we have made progress, persistent challenges, and solutions toward achieving equity.

The shared vision we developed through this process is consistent with the overall vision of King County's Strategic Plan:

**A King County where all people have equitable opportunities to thrive.**

# THEORY OF CHANGE



Race and place impact quality of life in King County. People of color, low-income residents and immigrants and refugees persistently face inequities in key educational, economic and health outcomes. Our responsibility to remedy these conditions is not only a moral imperative; inequities undermine our collective prosperity and threaten our region's ability to remain globally competitive. As long as race and place are predictors of well-being, our vision for a King County where all people have equitable opportunities to thrive remains elusive.

We also recognize that many of our government policies and practices have historically been designed to react to problems and crises in our communities after they arise. Using a "stream" metaphor, these problems are the downstream results of inequities that exist in social, physical and economic conditions in our community (also known as our "determinants of equity"). Moving upstream allows us to examine the root causes of these conditions and create solutions that operate at a systems and structural level, ultimately preventing crises and problems

from occurring and leading to healthier, more equitable outcomes.

As people are not all situated the same, with the same opportunities to thrive, pro-equity policies and practices are designed to account for these differences. Focusing on the people and places where needs are greatest leads to improved outcomes for everyone.

**"The prosperity of our region depends on every person having a fair chance to fulfill his, her or their potential."**

Executive Dow Constantine

Our Equity and Social Justice Theory of Change promotes investment in approaches that are pro-equity and move us upstream and where needs are greatest. Moreover, adopting this theory of change ensures that our strategies are consistently evaluated based on their equity outcomes, not just their intent. Ultimately, we seek a course where race and place are eliminated as predictors of prosperity and quality of life for the residents of King County.

# THEORY OF CHANGE

## A 'PRO-EQUITY' POLICY AGENDA & REGION

This Strategic Plan defines a Pro-Equity Policy Agenda aimed at advancing regional change, building on our work and lessons learned thus far while deepening and expanding access to the County's determinants of equity: digital equity, economic development and jobs, education and early childhood development, environment and climate, health and human services, housing, justice system and transportation.

The strategic planning process also created an opportunity for partner organizations to share and discuss important equity-focused work currently underway in our region, including a need for increased coordination and cross-sector driven solutions that match the scale of inequities we face. In addition to meeting our own strategic and operational responsibilities toward advancing Equity and Social Justice, King County government commits to advancing a Regional Equity Collaborative with partners from community organizations, philanthropy, business, local governments and education in the coming months and years.

## HAVING 'PRO-EQUITY' GOVERNANCE

To become 'pro-equity' in our County practices and governance, we need systems and standards that build on our best practices and learnings from our equity journey to date. We need both to lead as necessary and to respond consistently to our residents, partners and employees.

In our different areas of government, we need to ensure that our decisions, policies and practices produce gains for all, while targeting many of the benefits where needs are greatest.

We need new processes that are inclusive

and open, and in particular raise the voices and power of those in the community and our organization who have been historically sidelined by those who have traditionally exercised power. This is why the solutions in this plan are defined by those affected.

We are also challenging business as usual. The journey towards equity is necessarily disruptive. We must question existing systems of power and privilege by undoing the systems that have perpetuated unfair outcomes, and creating new spaces for learning and growth.

To achieve better outcomes in the community, we will integrate and implement pro-equity practices in our major functions of government where we can effect change, which include:

- Leadership, Operations & Services
- Policies, plans and budgets
- Workplace & Workforce
- Community partnerships
- Communications and education
- Facilities and systems improvements



King County

HOW KING COUNTY IS

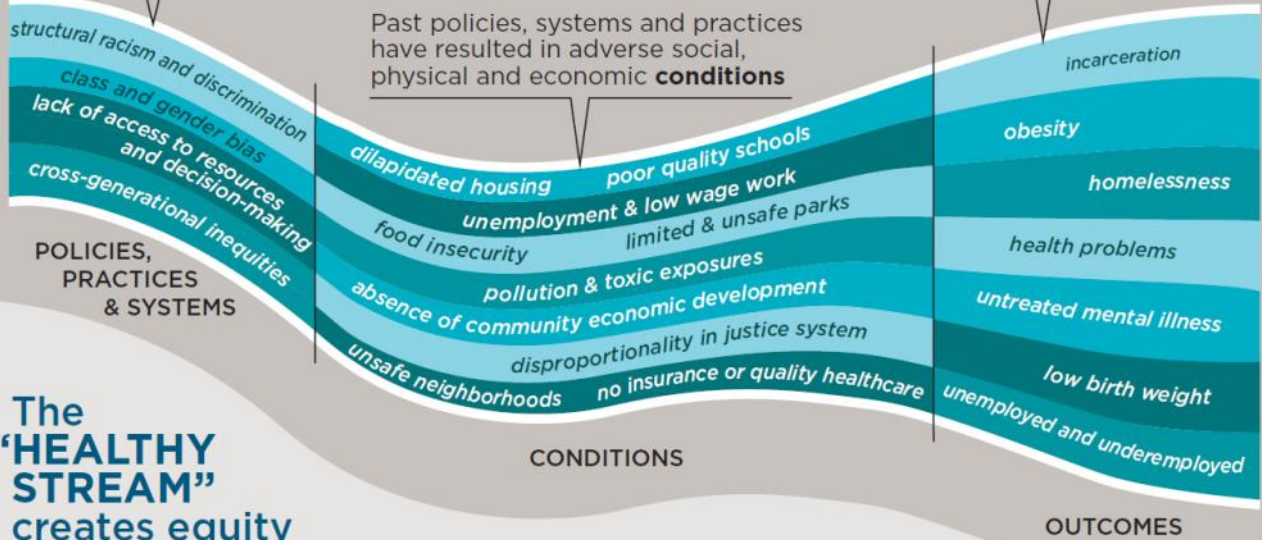
# BUILDING EQUITY...

**RACE AND PLACE MATTER IN KING COUNTY.** PEOPLE OF COLOR, LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS AND IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES PERSISTENTLY FACE INEQUITIES IN KEY AREAS, SUCH AS EDUCATION, INCOME AND HEALTH.

## The “UNHEALTHY STREAM” increases inequities

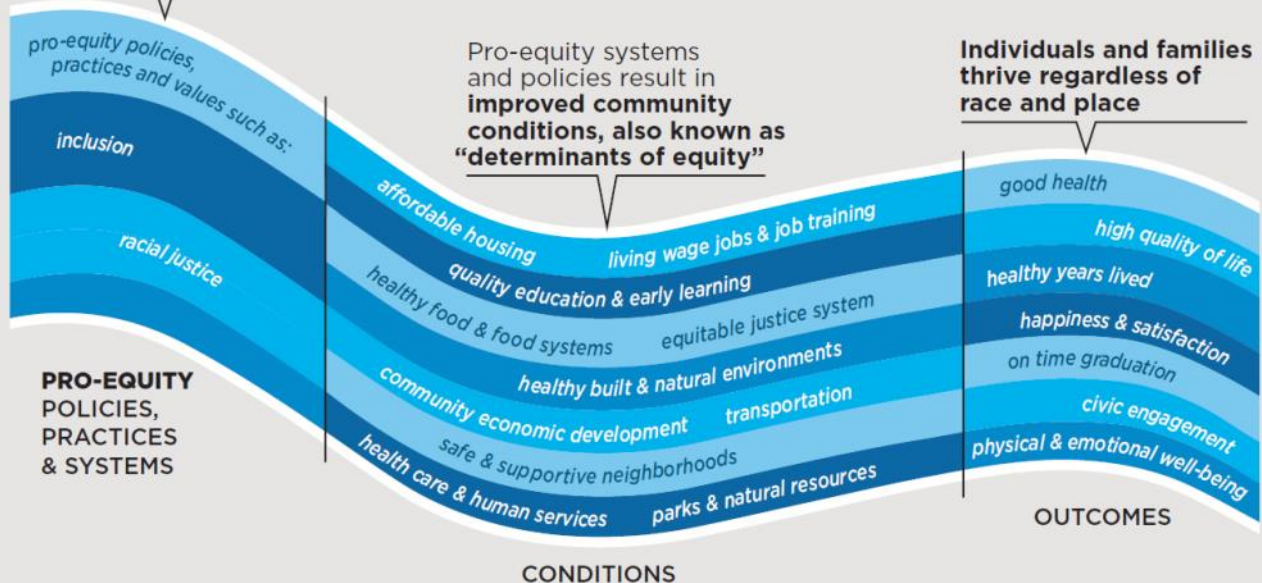
**Policies, structures and systems** – including those in government – have sustained and even contributed to inequities

Government programs historically have tended to react to problems and treat poor individual and family-level **outcomes**



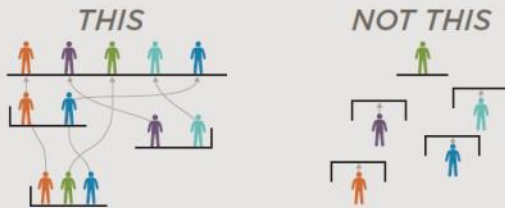
## The “HEALTHY STREAM” creates equity

For greatest and most effective impact, King County is **focusing “upstream” to address root causes and be pro-equity**



# AND ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE...

## PRO-EQUITY means



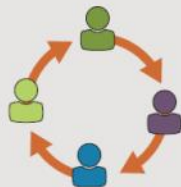
Defining outcomes for all, identifying obstacles faced by specific groups, and tailoring strategies and building on assets to address barriers (targeted universalism).



Dismantling systems of power, privilege and racial injustice in favor of equitable access to resources and decisions.



Focusing on the people and places where needs are greatest – such as low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant and refugee populations.



Creating inclusive processes and including people early, continuously and meaningfully.

## King County's path toward PRO-EQUITY

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# SO ALL PEOPLE HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE

## King County INVESTS...



**Upstream,**  
where needs  
are greatest,



in  
**community  
partnerships,**



and in  
**employees,**



with **transparent  
and accountable  
leadership.**

## We do this in **SIX AREAS OF GOVERNANCE**

**Workforce and  
workplace equity**  
*Build a pro-equity  
organization and  
workplace culture for every  
employee driven by a  
racially just and cultural  
responsive workforce  
at all levels*

**Leadership,  
operations and  
services**  
*Advance pro-equity  
practices and systems at  
all levels through  
accountable leadership  
and employees who  
are change  
agents*

**Equitable  
Budgeting, Planning  
and Policymaking**  
*Promote accountability to  
ensure our plans, policies,  
and budgets incorporate  
our ESJ values so that we  
equitably address the  
needs of our  
communities*



**Community  
Partnerships**  
*Invest in  
community-based  
partnerships that will  
steadily inform the County's  
decision-making and  
foster full and equitable  
civic participation*

**Communication  
and Education**  
*Advance our education  
and communication to  
better engage our residents  
and communities in ways  
that are inclusive,  
culturally responsive  
and socially just*

**Facility and  
Systems  
Improvements (CIP)**  
*Develop facility and  
system improvements  
responsive to the values  
and priorities of residents  
and stakeholders and  
achieve pro-equity  
outcomes*

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# OUR STRATEGIES



## Invest upstream and where needs are greatest

Moving upstream means:

- focusing on early childhood investments that prevent mental, behavioral and physical issues later in life;
- preventing crises and problems from occurring instead of treating the after-effects; and
- continuing and expanding strategies that reduce involvement in the criminal justice system and keep families together.

The equity frame demands that we focus on where the needs are greatest – geographic areas such as parts of south King County, and low-income populations, people of color, and immigrants and refugees.

We acknowledge that universal approaches that apply to a whole population can still result in unacceptable gaps. Instead, we must approach with targeted universalism – where we define goals for all, identify the obstacles faced by specific groups, and tailor strategies and building on assets to address the barriers in those situations.



## Invest in community partnerships

King County has a history of community engagement, but those interactions are often ad hoc, with insufficient compensation for the time and expertise of people and organizations, and without investment in organizations' capacity to continue and expand work.

This plan is designed to move the County from these occasional interactions to strategic investment in community partnerships that will inform the County's programming, service delivery and budgeting, and will provide equitable opportunity for all residents to advocate in their own behalf and influence the decisions that impact their lives. This strategy is rooted in the principle that those affected have the right to define decisions.



## Invest in employees

King County government's greatest asset is our approximately 14,000 employees who are

dedicated to improving the lives of the county's more than two million residents. They are the experts in providing the best services because they know and work with our communities every day.

King County's ambition is to become the best-run government in the nation with a workforce that is diverse and culturally responsive at all levels of the organization. To achieve this, we must ensure that every employee is valued for her, their or his unique assets and experiences and we invest in growing their talent – regardless of who they are, where they come from and where they are in the organization.

We are committed to focus our efforts on employees who have historically lacked equitable access to jobs and development opportunities, and employees at lower pay ranges.

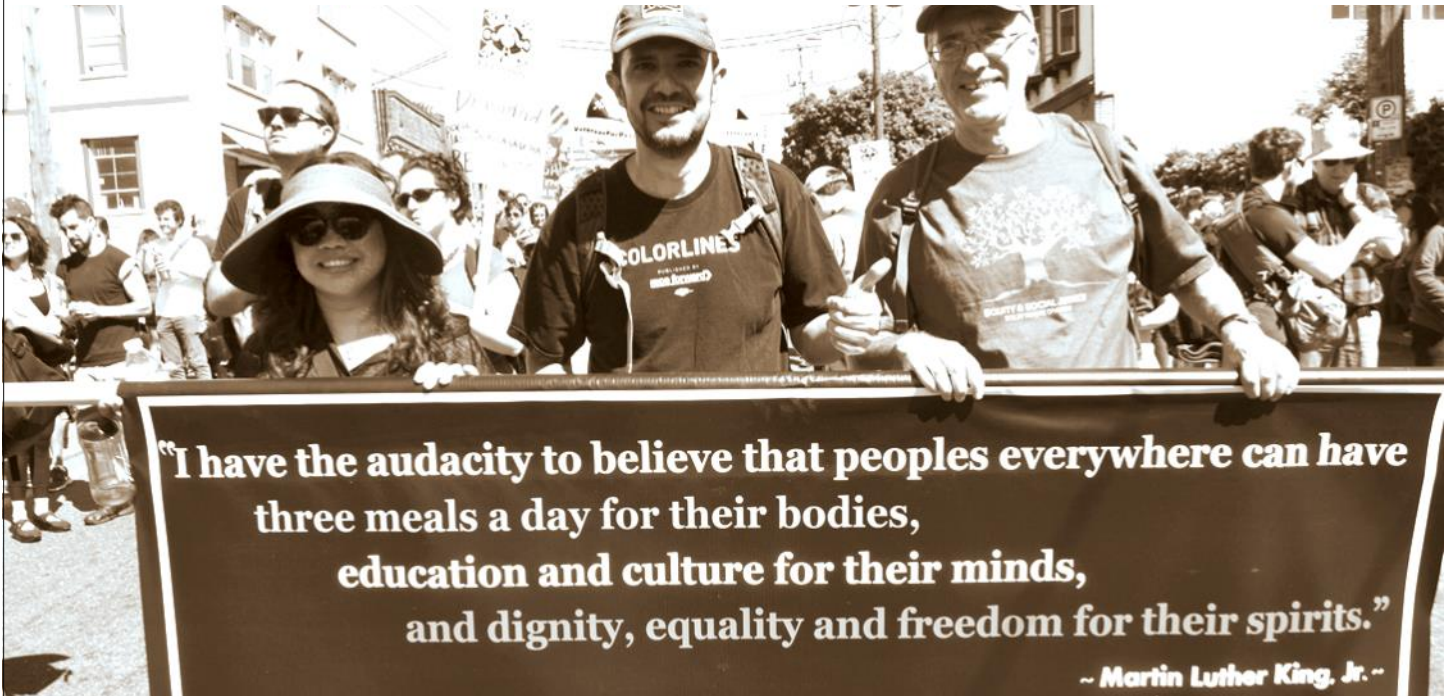


## With accountable and transparent leadership

Accountable and transparent leadership is critical to effectively implementing the ESJ Strategic Plan. The success of this Plan and considerable progress on equity is fundamentally tied to consistent and visible leadership at all levels around a shared vision for ESJ within and across King County government and the region.

All employees are change agents, though the County's top leaders are ultimately responsible for championing and advancing ESJ. A government that is rooted in equity and social justice means that leaders hold themselves and each other accountable, working openly with residents, employees and community partners.

# OUR SHARED VALUES



**We will instill our shared values on equity and social justice in all our work. We are:**

## **Inclusive and Collaborative**

Achieve better outcomes by engaging and including employees and communities early, continuously and meaningfully; we maximize opportunities and our collective potential by breaking down silos, partnering and convening across government and organizations.

## **Diverse and People-focused**

Represent the mosaic of our communities at all levels of the organization to innovate and better serve; we nurture respect and dignity by valuing every person's leadership, strengths and assets.

## **Responsive and Adaptive**

Be culturally and linguistically responsive to and driven by employees and community.

## **Transparent and Accountable**

Build trust and common understanding by being transparent and accountable in our actions, processes and measures.

## **Racially just**

Dismantle systems, policies and practices that perpetuate structural racism, inequities and different forms of discrimination based on power and privilege.

## **Upstream and Where Needs are Greatest**

We focus upstream on root causes and sustainable solutions –where returns are greatest –and on populations and places with the greatest needs.

Consistent with our ESJ Ordinance and the historical and persistent patterns of inequities, King County focuses on equity impacts on communities of color, low-income populations, and limited English-speaking residents. Though our approach is comprehensive, and true opportunity requires that every person have access to the benefits of our society regardless of race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or other aspects of who we are, what we look like, where we come from, where we live and what we believe in.

# OUR COMMON LANGUAGE

## INEQUITIES:

Differences in well-being that disadvantage on individual or group in favor of another; these are systemic, patterned and must be changed.\*

**Inequities are not random;**  
Inequities are caused by past and current decisions, systems of power and privilege, policies, and implementation of those policies.\*

## EQUITY: A SYSTEM OF FAIRNESS

Equity is the full and equal access to opportunities, power and resources so all people may achieve their full potential. Equity is an ardent journey toward well-being as defined by those most negatively affected.\*

## SOCIAL JUSTICE:

All aspects of justice—including legal, political, economic and environmental—and requires the fair distribution of and access to public goods, institutional resources and life opportunities for all people.\*

## RACE IN THE U.S.:

Race and racial categories in the U.S. are a social construction created by the dominant group with the intent to determine Dominant and Subordinate categories and access to resources; they have an assigned meaning. Racial categories have changed over time and thus how various communities experience race has changed over time.\*\*

## DETERMINANTS OF EQUITY:

The social, economic, geographic, political and physical environments and conditions in which people live. Full and equal access to the determinants of equity are necessary to have equity for all people regardless of race, class, gender, language spoken and geography.\*

## STRUCTURAL RACISM:

The interplay of policies, practices, programs and systems of multiple institutions which leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for communities of Color compared to white communities, that occurs within the context of racialized historical and cultural conditions.\*\*\*

## TARGETED UNIVERSALISM:

Led by those most affected and lifting up their assets, we define goals for all; identify obstacles faced by specific groups; and tailor strategies to address the barriers in those situations.\*\*\*

\*Definitions gathered from King County Equity and Social Justice Ordinance (16948)

\*\*As defined by Hackman Consulting

\*\*\*Developed by King County using multiple sources.